

CASE STUDY

Neighborhood Villages helps make COVID-19 testing accessible for early education and child care centers

Program snapshot

10,000

children, staff, and parents tested weekly (on average)

300-350

programs performing weekly PCR testing

Focused on vulnerable communities with high COVID-19 rates

Notable outcomes

Adapted testing operations to meet the particular needs of early education and care centers

Thousands of days of childcare saved*

Helped mitigate the shortage of teachers who were concerned about exposure to COVID-19

**Based on days of closure avoided and the number of children that would have been affected by each closure*

Neighborhood Villages is a non-profit that advocates for and implements scalable solutions for families' access to affordable, high-quality early education and care across Massachusetts. They were instrumental in securing government funding for comprehensive COVID-19 testing at early education and care centers at the state and federal level.

COVID-19 testing for young kids called for a fresh approach

Early education and care (EEC) programs share a lot in common with K-12. They're where kids learn, play, and grow. Staff dedicate their lives to shaping bright futures. Parents rely on them to take care of their children. During the pandemic though, Neighborhood Villages (NV) couldn't help but notice the differences between K-12 and early education in practice. Especially when it came to COVID-19 testing.

Most large-scale COVID-19 testing programs for kids, including Concentric's, were initially built with the context of K-12 schools in mind. K-12 testing models often rely on infrastructure that's common in schools—nurses, cafeterias, multiple rooms, and laptops—that most early childhood programs don't have. Young children, below the age of 5, also need more hands-on support for testing than the older kids in K-12 schools. With funding from the Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care, NV supported EEC programs that were struggling to adapt processes and learn new technologies to make testing happen, especially in communities where English is spoken as a second language.

“ We would always hear from programs how surprised they were to discover that people that were completely asymptomatic were positive. That's what makes [COVID-19] so tricky. PCR testing caught those cases under the radar that would have ended up spreading. Catching that asymptomatic case saved those families days of child care [and a potential closure].”

Binal Patel

Chief Program Officer, Neighborhood Villages



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Co-designing a testing solution for the EEC sector

Using NV's community insights as our guiding principles, Concentric got to work on revamping our offering with new capabilities and tactics designed for the early childhood sector. Reshaping the operations around EEC programs' pain points made it more realistic to implement. This didn't happen overnight, and it wasn't without its growing pains. As Concentric shouldered the day-to-day operations of the programs, NV's small but mighty team put in countless hours supporting their EEC partners in learning the system and iterating with Concentric on potential enhancements to make testing more accessible and efficient.

As successes took hold, the team set new standards to help their communities. They worked with us to create new training modules for EEC program staff, added bilingual staff and adopted translation services, hosted webinars for sharing best practices, and helped their EEC partners fine-tune testing models to fit each center's unique situation.

Reliable child care for low-income families

For families, routine testing helped save thousands of days of child care by preventing program closures, an outcome particularly crucial for low-income families. There was also a powerful psychological impact on EEC providers and their staff: having more tools to manage COVID-19 risk for themselves and the children in their care provided much-needed peace of mind. Through tireless field work and advocacy, NV continues to lend support to underserved communities bearing the brunt of the pandemic.



Concentric is powered by Ginkgo Bioworks, a synthetic biology company in Boston. Through Concentric, we aim to make peace of mind about community and environmental health attainable by everyone.

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